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DEPT FOR S/USSES, AF, EUR, M, DS, S/ES-O/CMS, INR, AND CA NSC FOR
LINDA ETIM AND JOHN BRENNAN. POSTS FOR RSO AND LEGAT

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SUBJECT: IRISH AMBASSADOR PROVIDES UPDATE ON HOSTAGES' SITUATION

REF: A) Khartoum 1024; 09/04/09
B) Khartoum 994; 08/30/09
C) Khartoum 894; 08/04/09

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Irish Ambassador Gerard Corr (resident in Cairo) met with DCM Asquino on September 8 to update him on the status of the two aid workers, Irish national Sharon Cummins and Ugandan citizen Hilda Kawuki, who were kidnapped in North Darfur on July 3. Ambassador Corr confirmed that Irish Foreign Minister Michael Martin had been in Khartoum September 6-7, working with the Government of Sudan (GOS) to expedite the release of the two aid workers. Based on developments during Irish FM's visit, Ambassador Corr seemed relatively optimistic that the hostages might be released by the end of the Ramadan holiday, which concludes on or about September 20. Ambassador Corr requested that during Special Envoy Gration's current visit to Sudan, he raise with GOS officials, including Dr. Ghazi Selahaddin, the USG's strong support for a peaceful resolution of the hostage taking situation that will result in the two women being released. The DCM relayed this request to Charge Whitehead, who is with SE Gration and his delegation in Juba. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The DCM, RSO, and Poloff met with at his request with Irish Ambassador Gerard Corr on September 8 to discuss the latest developments in the hostage-taking of Irish national Sharon Cummins and Ugandan citizen Hilda Kawuki. The two female aid workers, who work for GOAL, an Irish non-governmental organization (NGO), were kidnapped on July 3 when armed gunmen invaded the GOAL compound in Kutum, North Darfur. Ambassador Corr told the DCM that the kidnappers had previously requested two million USD in exchange for the hostages. As of three days ago, the group had lowered its ransom demand to 300,000 USD. Ambassador Corr added that he believed the group, which was initially eleven members, may now have dwindled to four individuals. At no point has the group made any political demands. Their motivation in the abduction clearly is for criminal gain according to the ambassador.

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador Corr described Irish Foreign Minister Michael Martin's September 6-7 visit to Khartoum as productive. Based on a conversation between the Irish FM and Presidential Adviser Dr. Ghazi Selahaddin, Ambassador Corr said he was optimistic that a resolution would be reached by the end of the Ramadan holiday. Ambassador Corr reported that shortly after the kidnapping, Sudan State Minister for Humanitarian Affairs Abdel Baqi al-Jailani was appointed to take the lead in dealing with the Irish in this matter. During the previous two hostage-taking incidents, the French and Canadian government representatives dealt almost exclusively with the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS).

¶4. (SBU) The Irish believe there was a failed attempt to secure the hostages' release three weeks ago when the GOS, presumably at the

recommendation of al-Jailani, provided financial compensation and possibly gifts in kind, such as jeep vehicles, to Kutum tribal and religious leaders. NISS had helicopters standing by and dispatched a fixed-wing aircraft to El Fasher, but the hostages were never handed over. Since that time, GOS seems to have taken a much harder line with the kidnappers and asked the Irish not to negotiate or interfere with their new isolation technique.

¶15. (SBU) This change in strategy might have also been prompted by the kidnapping of two UNAMID civilians in Zalingei, West Darfur on August 29 (ref b). The latter was the fourth hostage-taking incident in Darfur to occur within the last six months. The Irish Ambassador confided that GOS officials have discussed using force to carry out a rescue attempt, termed as "Plan B," but they have promised they would not do so unless the hostages were under serious threat. NISS has reportedly indicated the next few days are extremely important for a successful release of the hostages.

¶16. (SBU) Ambassador Corr requested that during Special Envoy Gration's current visit to Sudan, he raise with GOS officials, including Dr. Ghazi Selahaddin, the USG's strong support for a peaceful resolution of the hostage taking situation that will result in the two women being released. The DCM relayed this request to Charge Whitehead, who is with SE Gration and his delegation in Juba. Ambassador Corr said that the Embassy of Ireland in Washington will also be in contact with the Department to request such support.

¶17. (SBU) Comment: Ambassador Corr appeared to be more cautiously optimistic during this visit than on past occasions that there is now "a greater GOS determination" to resolve the hostage crisis in the coming weeks. The Post continues to monitor this case closely in addition to the separate kidnappings of two United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) expatriate civilians in Zalengei, West Darfur. The RSO intends to travel to Darfur September 10-12 to follow-up with UNAMID security officials. The Mission will also continue to liaise closely with the Irish Hostage Negotiations Unit based in Khartoum. End Comment.

WHITEHEAD